

GILA NATIONAL FOREST



NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Supervisor's Office
3005 E. Camino del Bosque
Silver City NM 88061

Andrea Martinez
Public Affairs Officer
(505) 388-8211
agmartinez@fs.fed.us

August 30, 2006

Big Game Hunters, Rains, Roads and Trails

Silver City, NM—Even though summer rains have brought much-needed moisture to the Gila National Forest, it has also brought its own set of frustrations and challenges. With the ground pretty well saturated, additional summer rains can easily make access to big game hunt units very frustrating and challenging!

District Rangers on the Gila National Forest strongly advise hunters to expect poor road conditions and to use caution in low-lying drainage areas where flashfloods can easily occur. "Hunters have started setting up their camps and are finding that many of their favorite and well-known forest roads are a challenge to travel through. Continued rains have left roads extremely muddy with creek bottoms and other drainage areas washed out, rutted or strewn with rocks and debris," says District Ranger Larry Cosper, Black Range Ranger District.

Cosper recommends a few land ethics to maximize hunters' success of arriving safely at camp and for a successful hunt devoid of any hindrances:

- Become familiar with weather forecasts. Know the weather patterns of the area! In mountainous areas, thunderstorms typically develop in the early afternoon, so plan accordingly.
- Have Gila National Forest or wilderness topographic maps available.
- Check with local Ranger District offices for current information on road and trail conditions.
- Come prepared with necessary tools and other equipment e.g. shovel, vehicle jack, spare tire in good condition, flashlights, fire starter, etc.
- Leave itinerary with family/friends in case of unexpected delays in returning home.
- Become familiar with land status of areas of expected vehicle travel; respect public lands as well as those privately owned. Keep gates closed. If a gate is there, it's for a reason.
- Horsemen and women should expect to encounter trails that have been washed out or strewn with logs.
- Backpackers, hikers & horsemen and women traveling into the Gila Wilderness are advised that the Gila River is running high; extreme caution is advised when attempting to cross. All other rivers and creeks on the Forest are also running higher than normal.
- Avoid camping in low-lying areas where creeks, arroyos and canyons can easily experience flashfloods. Set camp in higher ground and away from these drainage areas.
- Stay on main roads and limit off-road travel to minimize resource damage e.g. causing damage to existing roads, fragile soils, plant loss, etc.
- Be especially careful when a thunderstorm is occurring at a higher elevation and even though it may not be raining where you are at, these thunderstorms can easily cause flash flooding downstream.
- Avoid already flooded areas. Never attempt to cross running floodwater.
- Use extra caution at night when it's harder to see road, trail or flood dangers.
- During a severe rainstorm, it's best to stay put until the storm passes.
- Abide by all NM Game and Fish hunting regulations.

Although the Bear Fire area, approximately 55,000 acres, remains closed to the public due to safety concerns, a new fire closure order for the burned area becomes effective Friday, September 1, 2006. The closure order re-opens a portion of Forest Road 28 and all of Catron County Road C-021 (formerly Forest Road 142) leading to Dipping Vat Campground at Snow Lake and Aeroplane Mesa Campground and trailhead. The re-opening of County Road C-021 provides access into the Gila Wilderness, specifically Hunt Unit 16B.

Visitors are also reminded that NO off-road vehicle travel will be allowed within the Bear Fire area; all roads will be closed except those that have been cleared of hazard trees; and hunting, camping and recreating in the burnt area that lies within Hunt Unit 16A will be allowed on foot or horseback.

Reserve District Ranger Rogers Steed comments, "Hazards in the Bear Fire burned area such as snags, rolling debris, burnt out stump holes and flash flooding remain; extreme caution is advised when traveling anywhere in the fire area."

"Pay attention to your environment and use caution at all times," adds Cosper.

Please contact the Ranger District offices of the Gila National Forest for updated information on road and trail conditions!!

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